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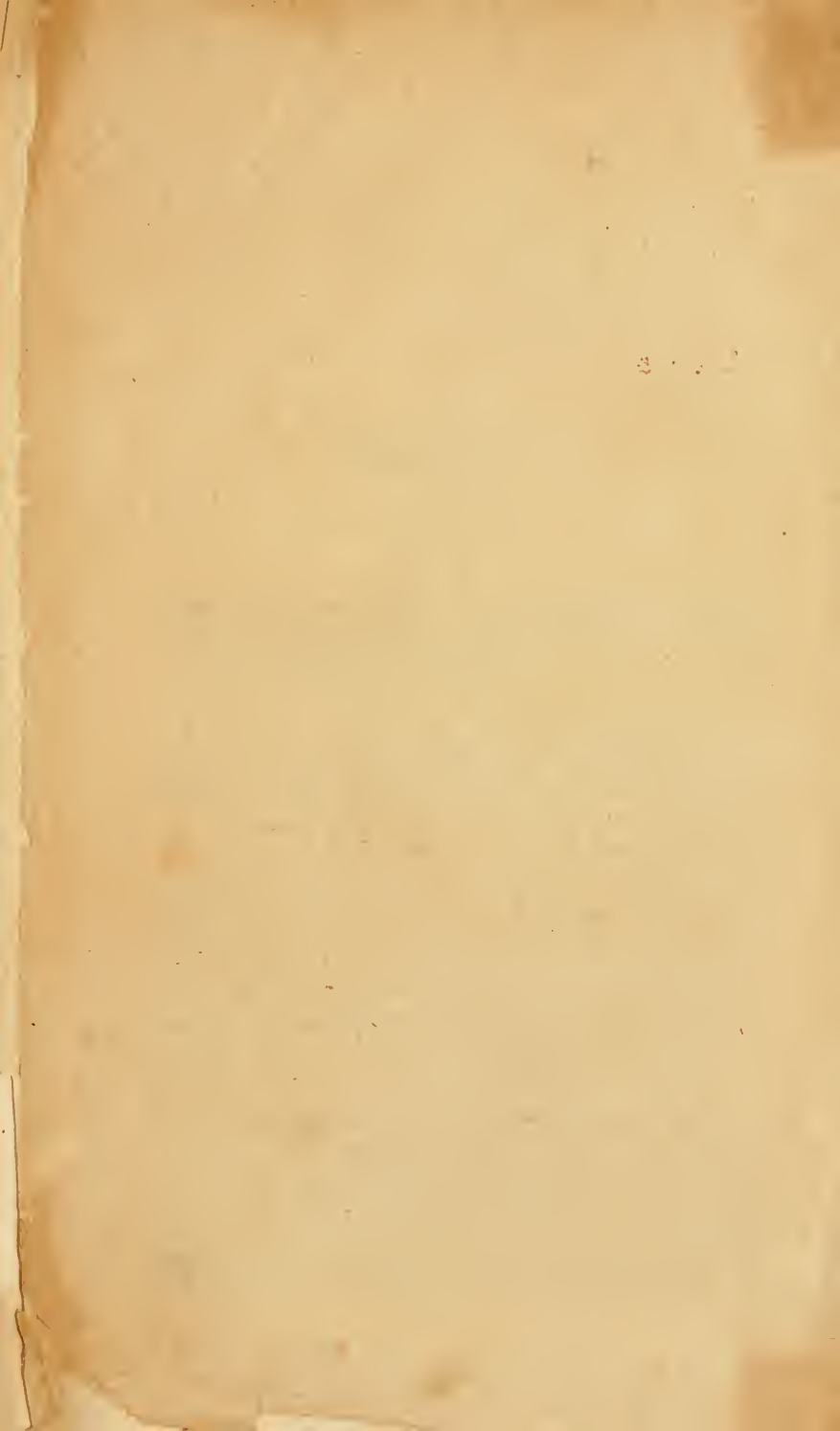
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Samuel Miller's Sermons.



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SERMON.

TITUS I. 9.

Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

THE inspired Apostle is here giving directions concerning the proper character and qualifications of ministers of the Gospel. Some duties are common to all christians; while others belong either exclusively, or in an eminent degree, to pastors and teachers. The latter is the case with regard to the injunction implied in our text. On all the disciples of Christ is laid the charge to "hold fast the faithful word;" but on the guides and rulers in the house of God is this obligation especially devolved; among other reasons, for this, that they "may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers."

By "the faithful word," here spoken of, we are evidently to understand the pure, unadulterated doctrines of Christ; the genuine Gospel, as revealed by a gracious God for the benefit of sinful men. Not the doctrines of this or the other particular denomination of Christians, as such, but the doctrines of the BIBLE.

This system of doctrine is represented as that which we "have been taught." The Gospel which we preach, my friends, is not *our* Gospel. We neither *invented* it, nor can we *improve* it. "I certify you," says the same Apostle who penned the words of our text—"I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The original word, here properly translated "hold fast," is very strong and expressive in its import. It signifies keeping *a firm hold* of any thing, in opposition to those who would *wrest it from us*. Of course, it implies that Gospel truth is and will ever be opposed by enemies and "gainsayers;" and that maintaining and propagating truth must always be expected, in such a world as this, to require unceasing *effort* and *conflict*.

The general position of our text, then, is—That the Ministers of our holy Religion, if they desire to convince, to convert, or to edify their fellow-men, are solemnly bound to maintain for themselves, and diligently to impart to those around them, "**SOUND DOCTRINE,**" or, in other words, the **GENUINE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL.**

To illustrate and confirm this position, let us, *first*, inquire, *why* we ought to maintain "sound doctrine;" and, *secondly*, *how* it ought to be maintained; or in what *manner*, and by what *means*?

I. The first inquiry which demands our attention, is,—*why* ought we to maintain "sound doctrine?" Why is it important that all believers, and Ministers of Religion in particular, should "hold fast the faithful word?" And here, let me ask,

1. Can any thing more be necessary to establish the duty before us, than the consideration that “*the faithful word*” of which we speak is from God; that it was given to us for our temporal and eternal benefit; and, of course, given, not to be disregarded, but to be respected, studied, loved, and diligently applied to the great purposes for which it was revealed? To suppose that we are at liberty lightly to esteem *such a gift*, coming from *such a source*; or that we commit no sin in voluntarily permitting a deposit so precious to be corrupted, perverted, or wrested from us, is a supposition equally dishonourable to God, and repugnant to every dictate of reason.

2. But further; “holding fast” the genuine system of revealed truth, *is frequently and solemnly commanded by the great God of truth*. Both the Old Testament and the New abound with injunctions to this amount. In the former, we are exhorted to “cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding; to seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures.” We are exhorted to “buy the truth, and not to sell it.” And they are highly commended who are represented as “valiant for the truth.” In the latter, the language of the Holy Spirit is, “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast received.” And again, “Contend earnestly for the faith”—that is, the revealed doctrine which is the object of faith—“once delivered to the saints.” And again, “Be not carried about with every wind of doctrine, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” And again, “Hold fast the profession of your faith firm without wavering.” And again, “If there come any unto you, and bring not

this doctrine"—that is, the true doctrine of Christ—"receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed, is a partaker of his evil deeds." Nay, the inspired Apostle pronounces, "If any man come unto you, and bring any other Gospel"—that is, any other system of doctrine concerning the salvation by Christ—"than that which ye have received, let him be accursed."*

3. The obligation to "hold fast" the genuine doctrines of the Gospel, appears from considering *the great importance which the Scriptures every where attach to evangelical truth.*

I am aware that it is a popular sentiment with many who bear the Christian name, that *doctrine* is of little moment, and that *practice* alone is all in all. But such persons surely forget that there can be no settled and habitual *good practice*, without *good principles*; and that sound, correct doctrine, is but another name for sound principle. Take away the doctrines of the Gospel, and you take away its essential character. You take away every thing that is adapted to enlighten, to restrain, to purify, to console, and to elevate. Take away the doctrines of our holy Religion, in other words, the great truths of which the "glad tidings of great joy" are composed, and you take away the essence of the whole message;—the seed of all spiritual life; the aliment on which every believer lives; the vital principles of all experimental piety, and of all holy practice. What is *Faith*, but cordially embracing, with confidence and love, the great truths

* Prov. ii. 3, 4. Prov. xxiii. 23. Jerem. ix. 3. 11. Tim. i. 13. Jude 3. Ephes. iv. 14. Heb. x. 23. 11. John, 10, 11. Galat. i. 9.

concerning duty and salvation which the Scriptures reveal? What is *Repentance*, but a holy sorrow for sin, founded on a spiritual perception of those doctrines concerning God, his character, his law, and the plan of mercy which his word proclaims? What is *Hope*, but looking forward with holy desire and expectation to that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which "the truth as it is in Jesus" freely offers to our acceptance? What, in short, is *Religion*, in the largest sense of the term, but the combination of "knowledge of the truth," "love of the truth," and "walking in the truth?" What is it but having just apprehensions of those great Objects which are revealed in Christian doctrine; just affections and desires toward them; and acting out these desires and affections in the temper and life? No wonder, then, that when the impenitent are converted, they are said to "come to the knowledge of the truth;" that they are said to be "born again by the word of truth;" to be "made free by the truth," and to "obey the truth;"—by all which expressions we are plainly taught, that truth, or, which is the same thing, Christian doctrine, is the grand instrument, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, by which spiritual life is begun, carried on, and completed in every subject of redeeming grace.

Hence it is, that the scriptures every where represent bringing the truth, in some way, to men, as absolutely necessary to their conversion and salvation. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Hence they so plainly teach us, that there can be no real piety where the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are not embraced. "Who-soever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not

God." On this principle, too, it is, that the inspired volume, with awful emphasis, declares certain "heresies" to be "damnable"—that is, inevitably destructive to the souls of men. And on the same principle it is, that all Scripture, and all experience teach us, that wherever the preaching and the prevalence of true doctrine has declined, there piety, immediately, and in a corresponding ratio, has declined; good morals have declined; and all the most precious interests of the church and of civil society, have never failed to be essentially depressed.

We cannot, indeed, undertake to pronounce *how much knowledge* of sound doctrine is necessary to salvation; or *how much error* is sufficient to destroy the soul. But we know, from the nature of the case, and especially from the word of God, that all error, like poison, is mischievous, and, of course, ought to be avoided. I know not, indeed, how large a quantity of a given deleterious drug might be necessary, in a particular case, to take away life: but of one thing there can be no doubt, that it is madness to sport with it, and that the less we take of it the better. As nothing but nutritious food will support the animal body; so nothing but Zion's provision, which is truth, can either commence, or sustain "the life of God in the soul of man."

4. Further; the duty to maintain and hold forth sound doctrine, may be urged from the consideration, *that such doctrine is universally distasteful to the unsanctified heart, and, therefore, requires not only to be presented, but also to be importunately pressed on the attention of men, if, by the blessing of God, we may prevail with them to receive it.*

It is, somewhere, justly remarked, by one of the most eloquent of living preachers,* that, of all kinds of truth, the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ is precisely that, and that alone, for which there is no natural demand among men. All other kinds of truth are called for, even by unsanctified minds. Literary truth; philosophical truth; political truth; commercial truth; mechanical truth;—for all these there is a general, steady, and growing demand, as population becomes more extended and active; because for all of them, there is, among the diversified classes of society, a deep-seated, natural taste. But with regard to the most precious of all truth,—that which relates to God, and the way of salvation, there is no natural demand among the mass of mankind. No, my brethren, we are perfectly aware that the Gospel which we preach—a Gospel which proclaims to men their guilt and depravity, and a method of recovery which lays the sinner in the dust, and stains all his pride;—we are perfectly aware that this is a Gospel which the natural heart every where hates, and is disposed to reject; which, of course, none ever naturally desire or seek; and which, therefore, requires not merely to be held up to the view of men, but to be urged and pressed on their minds, with ceaseless repetition, as long as they continue within the reach of the voice of mercy.

Nor is this all. The same distaste for the holy, humbling, and self-denying doctrines of the Gospel, which renders all men, by nature, disposed to reject them;—disposes them also to *pervert* these doctrines; to contrive, in a thousand ways, to *reduce* and *mutilate* them, and thus to endeavour to divest them of

* DR. CHALMERS.

their offensive character, and accommodate them to the taste of unsanctified men. This undoubted fact renders it necessary that all who profess to love the Religion of Christ, and especially Ministers, who are, by Divine appointment, the official conservators of evangelical truth, be constantly on the watch to mark these unhallowed attempts at mutilation and perversion ; to guard those who are under their care against the insidious arts of error ; to distinguish with clearness between truth and falsehood ; to recommend the one, and denounce the other ; and thus to “hold fast” and hold forth sound doctrine, for the benefit of themselves and others.

5. Another reason why Ministers of Religion ought to be vigilant, firm, and unwearied in “holding fast sound doctrine,” is, *that the enemies of truth are every where zealous and indefatigable in opposing it.* This consideration is closely allied with the preceding, but is, nevertheless, worthy of separate notice.

If men were not, every where, prone to embrace error ; if they did not naturally love error better than truth ; and if the advocates of erroneous opinions were not active and unceasing in their efforts to insinuate them into the minds of men ; there would be the less call for unremitting vigilance and activity on the part of the “watchmen on the walls of Zion.” We know, however, that the advocates of error not only abound in every part of the world, but also that their exertions to propagate their sentiments are equally ceaseless, diversified, ingenious and unwearied. Argument, ridicule, intimidation, flattery, and all the arts which talent, learning, and diligence enable them to apply for extending the dominion of their delusive principles, are constantly employed for effecting this

fatal purpose. To say nothing of the avowed rejector of all revelation, the Unitarian, the Pelagian, the Universalist, and the whole train of errorists, under the Christian name, are incessantly busy, from the pulpit and the press, in public and in private, in disseminating their pestilential doctrines. Indeed it is melancholy to think that the advocates of error, like the other "children of this world" "are wiser in their generation than the children of light;"—that is, more active, more cunning, more watchful, more adroit, more quick-sighted in devising means, and more unwearied in pursuing them; more ingenious in availing themselves of opportunities and prejudices in their favour; and, on all these accounts, more apt to be successful in carrying the multitude with them.

In these circumstances, how important is it that the advocates of truth be awake, active, and faithful in guarding the precious deposit committed to their charge! How wise ought they to be in discriminating and explaining; how courageous in defending; how firm in "holding fast," and how diligent in proposing, recommending and enforcing the truth on all around them! The fact is, those whose duty it is to plead the cause of "sound doctrine," in the present world, are like mariners rowing against both wind and tide. To make head-way, requires incessant exertion. The moment it is intermitted, without a miracle, the current bears them, and all the interests in behalf of which they plead, rapidly down the stream.

6. A further consideration which shows the importance of ministers' "holding fast," and endeavouring diligently to propagate the genuine doctrines of the Bible, is, *that there is, every where, such a de-*

plorable lack of doctrinal information among the mass of the people.

It might be supposed that in this age of printing and of books, and especially when the press has been, of late, so much enlisted on the side of truth and piety, that there would be found, at any rate among the friends of religion, much more extended reading, and digested knowledge, than in any former times. But I am under a great mistake if this be the fact. Half a century ago, serious professors of religion, and especially those who laid claim to the character of intelligent Christians, were much more, I apprehend, in the habit of retired and careful religious reading, than is now common. Then the BIBLE, though copies of it were not so multiplied as at present, was daily and abundantly perused. Then the popular writings of *Owen, Baxter, Flavel, Charnock, Bunyan, Manton, Halyburton, Watts, Doddridge, Dickinson, Edwards, Bellamy*, and a number more of the same class, were found on the shelves of most pious families connected with our church, and other evangelical denominations;—were read with some degree of intelligence and care; and recommended to the rising generation. But has not this laudable habit, within a few years past, fallen into comparative disuse? Do not private christians, now, commonly spend much less time in storing their minds with scriptural knowledge than formerly? I fear we cannot deny that such is the fact. For this fact perhaps *two reasons* may be assigned.

The *first* is, that professing christians of the present day have so many objects of *public* enterprise and exertion, to occupy their time, and engage their attention, that they are often tempted to slight the

more *private*, and less attractive duties of retirement and devotion. There is so much to be done by every man of zeal and energy, in helping forward the multiplied plans of Christian benevolence which characterize the present period, that, unless he be very careful to redeem time, and possess great decision of Christian character, he will often find the duties of the closet crowded into a corner, or, perhaps, occasionally, excluded altogether, by his public engagements. Besides ; there is something in the very nature of zealous efforts, and especially of *public* efforts, to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, so exciting, so warming, so spirit-stirring, that they are adapted to gratify some of the strongest natural feelings as well as the gracious principles of men. Hence they are often more attractive, even to good men, than those duties which include less of public exhibition, and of social excitement. The consequence is, that many, otherwise exemplary professors of religion, who are called to take an active part in the great operations of the day, spend less of their time in retirement and devotion ;—meditate less—read less—pray less—examine themselves less than persons equally engaged in religion, were wont to do formerly ; and, of course, employ less time in instructing and catechising their children, and in praying with them, and for them. In these circumstances, it is by no means wonderful that both parents and children should manifest much less digested and mature scriptural knowledge, than the multiplied privileges of the day would seem to warrant us in expecting.

A *second* reason for the undoubted deficiency of doctrinal knowledge, even in the church, may, perhaps, be drawn from *the light and ephemeral charac-*

ter of what we may call the religious literature of the day. Have not religious *Newspapers*, and other light *periodical publications*, in a great measure taken the place of the larger and more instructive works before alluded to? Publications which, by their *number*, have left little *time* for other reading; and by their superficial *character*, little *taste* for reading of a more deep, solid and connected kind. Is it not manifest, that the mass, even of the hopefully pious, have a large portion of their reading time so much occupied, and their taste so much formed, by the details of religious intelligence; by the exciting eloquence of anniversaries; and by the pungent discussion to which new projects and controversies give rise; that they have seldom much relish for the calm study of evangelical truth, or even for the retired and prayerful perusal of the Scriptures? What proportion of private Christians at the present day, with all the multiplication and almost universal circulation of weekly and monthly journals, which profess to diffuse religious knowledge, would be able, think you, to defend their professed creed against a plausible adversary, or to give an intelligent “reason of the hope that is in them”? I am afraid a very small proportion indeed. Nay, is there not some reason to fear, that even Ministers of the Gospel, in many cases, have their reading too-much confined to the passing periodical works of the day; if not to the exclusion, at least to the lamentable diminution of that profounder and more mature study to which the spiritual teachers and guides of the people ought to be ever habitually addicted?—My friends, I make no charge; I prefer no accusation against those whom I now address. But I, most respectfully, offer these queries to your

serious and impartial consideration. How far they may be considered as applying to the religious population of this City and neighbourhood, I know not. But there are neighbourhoods, to which, my better acquaintance with their state enables me to say, that they are by no means inapplicable.

You will not consider me, I trust, as intending to proscribe, or even to censure, religious periodical publications. When wisely conducted, and not inordinately multiplied, they deserve to be regarded as among the rich blessings of the day in which we live ; and those who refuse to patronize them, deprive themselves, and, so far as their example goes, deprive the Church of God, of an invaluable auxiliary. But when publications of this kind become so numerous as to impoverish and enfeeble one another, and render it difficult for any to attain the highest excellence : and, especially, when persons altogether inadequate to the task of instructing and guiding the religious public, undertake to be their conductors, merely “for a piece of bread ;” they can only be sources of paltry amusement. Solid intellectual and moral nutrition, it is impossible they should furnish. Wherever this is the case, the consequences cannot fail of being deplorable. There will, almost necessarily, ensue, a diminished attention to Christian doctrine ; of course a diminished knowledge of it ; and, consequently, a constant liability to be “carried about by every wind of doctrine,” to which ignorance, vanity, or fanaticism may attempt to give currency in the community. And, accordingly, how often have we seen, to our astonishment, not only individual professors, but, perhaps, considerable portions of particular churches, which we once thought as well instructed and ex-

emplary as almost any among us, borne away by the very first onset of some plausible errorist, and making a temporary, if not a final "shipwreck of the faith" !

Now, such being the deplorable deficiency of sound and discriminating Christian knowledge, among the mass, even of serious, and otherwise exemplary, professors ; is it not peculiarly important that some counteracting influence should be found and applied ? And to whom are we to look, under God, for this influence, but to the Leaders and Guides of the Church ? If, as the Prophet informs us, "the Priest's lips are to keep knowledge," surely there are none to whom we can more rightfully turn for relief, than to the ministers of religion. And I will venture to say, that there cannot be a characteristic prevalence of popular ignorance where *they* are duly faithful, in the various ways which their office demands, in "feeding the people with knowledge and with understanding."

7. The diffusion of sound religious doctrine through all classes of the community, *is one of the surest means of establishing and perpetuating our national privileges.*

We often, my friends, congratulate ourselves on the free constitutions of government under which we are so happy as to live. That our lot is cast in a land where the People, under God, are supreme ; where we are not called to bow to the will of a crowned despot, or to the oppressions of privileged orders : Where we have no ecclesiastical establishments ; but where, under governments of our own choice, and laws of our own formation, all enjoy those "equal rights to which the laws of nature, and of nature's God entitle them." And we may well

congratulate ourselves, and be thankful for these privileges. The great Governor of the world "hath not dealt so with any other nation." "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places, yea we have a goodly heritage." And our prayer, as patriots, and as Christians ought to be, that these inestimable blessings may be preserved and transmitted, unimpaired, to the latest generations.

But *how*, think you, my respected hearers, may we rationally hope that these blessings will be preserved inviolate, and transmitted to a distant posterity? I take for granted every individual in this assembly is, in his judgment convinced that such a hope cannot be realized without the general prevalence of Christian principle. An ignorant people, *must* be an irreligious people. An irreligious people *must* be an immoral people. And an immoral people *must* be a miserable people. That such a people should be long *free*, is just as impossible as that light and darkness should agree, or that the relation of cause and effect should cease. Many, indeed, tell us, that literature and philosophy, without the fear of God, without the Gospel of Christ, will restrain, purify, and regulate men, and generate the purest and most efficient patriotism. Nay, it is the favourite theory of some, given up to the insanity of infidel fanaticism—the most blind and senseless of all fanaticism—that the only hope of perfecting and perpetuating the social system, in its best form, is, to reject the religion of Christ; to renounce the laws of Marriage and of the Sabbath; and, in short, to throw off most of the restraints which the religious and moral code, under which we are so happy as to live, imposes. But believe them not. As well might they tell us that we

must all turn brutes in order to be perfect and happy men. No, the native fruit of their unhallowed system, is, that selfishness, avarice, profligate ambition, fraud, violence, luxury, and unbridled sensuality, which have always been the great destroyers of Republics, and which, if ever they become generally characteristic of our population, will as infallibly destroy *us*, and deliver us up, either to the most horrible anarchy, or to the gloomiest tyranny, as ever they did the most miserable of our predecessors.

These things being so, can any one possibly doubt that the diligent diffusion of pure religious knowledge is of inestimable importance to the best interests of our beloved country?—That enlightened patriotism, as well as piety, ought to labour unceasingly to impart it to all classes of the community, and especially to the rising generation? No, my friends, mathematical demonstration never conducted any man to a more unquestionable result. Whether I were called upon, then, to address you as good citizens, or as faithful Christians, I would say to you all, and more particularly to those of your number who bear the office of the holy ministry—Give all diligence to impart pure, Bible knowledge to all within your reach—to old and young, high and low, rich and poor, bond and free. Teach them the character of God, and the relations which we all equally bear to him. Teach them the condition of our race, by nature, as polluted, guilty sinners in the sight of their heavenly Sovereign. Teach them the way of pardon and sanctification through the atoning sacrifice, and life-giving Spirit of the Divine Redeemer, and the endearing ties by which the principles of our “common salvation” bind together the whole human family. Teach them that

all men are by nature equal in the sight of God ; and, therefore, that all tyranny and oppression are objects of his righteous abhorrence. Teach them that the “kingdom of Christ is not of this world ;” and, therefore, that every species of alliance between Church and State is forbidden, and can never fail to become a curse to both. Teach them to abhor those vices which the laws of man cannot reach, but which do more to undermine and destroy social happiness than a volume could unfold. Teach them to love those graces and virtues, which human authority cannot enforce, but which are vital to the establishment of social prosperity.—Teach them faithfully and diligently these things--and you cannot take a more direct course to lift up their minds above every thing that is grovelling and corrupt ; to curb their unruly appetites ; to restrain their unhallowed passions ; to banish fraud, intemperance and voluptuousness, from the land ; to promote industry, self-denial, moderation, and universal order, justice, purity and benevolence. You cannot take a more direct and certain course to render the insidious demagogue despised, and to deprive the profligate votary of ambition of all his influence ; to inspire a love of liberty, and to promote the prevalence of the purest patriotism. You cannot employ a more infallible means to secure a faithful use of the elective franchise, and, consequently, to exalt the wise and the good to stations of authority. You cannot, in a word, take a more direct course to establish the reign of all those principles, sentiments and habits, which, a thousand-fold more than constitutions and laws, tend to perpetuate civil and religious liberty, and social happiness.

Christians! ministers of the gospel! here lies our country's fairest, best, *ONLY* hope! To those who love the cause of Christ, is committed, under God, her precious destiny. Spread Christian knowledge in every direction. Never rest satisfied while there is a dark corner of our land unfurnished with faithful Bible instruction; and you will transmit, unimpaired, our precious privileges as a people to that bright and blessed day of millennial glory, when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ;"—and when "the knowledge and glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

8. But further; *the Great Operations of the day in which we live, call for special attention and diligence in regard to the object for which I plead.*

It is one of the glories, my friends, of the period in which our lot is cast, that professing christians of almost every denomination have come together, and are more and more coming together, for the purpose of uniting their efforts to send *Bibles*, religious *Tracts*, the living *Missionary*, and the system of *Sabbath Schools*, throughout the world. I repeat it, this is one of the great glories of the day in which we live. Every minister, and every christian who is so happy as to live at this day, ought to be thankful for it as a great privilege; to enter into the spirit of the hal-
lowed co-operation; and to cheer it on by his example, his exertions, and his substance, as well as by his prayers. If there be a minister or a professing Christian, who looks coldly upon these great plans of christian benevolence, and refuses to put his hand to the work,—I "judge him not;" but he really seems to

me to stand very near, if not actually in, the ranks of those who "will not come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty," and who are placed in no very enviable eminence in the sacred history.

Be it remembered, however, that one fundamental principle of this noble union is, that all the denominations which are parties to it, promise neither to compromise, nor to invade the peculiarities of each other. The publications circulated are of a general character, in which they all agree. The practical language of their union is to the following amount. "We will agree to act *together*, for the sake of acting with *more strength*, and upon a *greater scale*. To a certain extent, we are entirely united, both in principle and practice. To that extent, we can cordially co-operate without difficulty. And as to the peculiar doctrines which the pious *Presbyterian*, the pious *Episcopalian*, or the pious *Methodist* may wish to see circulated within the limits of his own denomination; let the Pastors and Teachers, within the respective bounds of each, take care, in addition to the general measures, which are not sectarian, to provide for conveying that appropriate instruction which each may deem desirable and important."

This is fair, honourable, and christian-like. But let me request you to take particular notice, that the faithful and happy execution of this admirable plan, not only *allows*, but really *requires*, that each particular denomination engaged in carrying it on, be careful not to neglect, or even slight, either of its parts. While, on the one hand, they cordially act upon the principles of their union, and circulate the general publications which they have agreed in forming, through every part of the land; on the other,

each party is no less bound, by an implied pledge, to be diligent in instructing its own population, and especially its own children and young people, in its own peculiar views of truth and order. If this be not done, either many discerning and zealous individuals, of each denomination, will withdraw from the Union, as not faithfully executed, and as adapted, ultimately, to deceive and ensnare: or, the next generation will grow up in a great measure uninstructed; or, to speak in the most guarded terms, very far from being instructed in theological truth in that accurate and discriminating manner which the enlightened guardians of "the household of faith" know to be important.

Under this impression, if I could speak to every Presbyterian Minister and Church in the *United States*, it would be in the following language—If you desire to see different denominations of Christians more and more united in affection and effort; if you wish well to the great Institutions of pious benevolence, round which, and in behalf of which the followers of Christ, of different names, are rallying with holy zeal; if you wish them to remain, and to become more and more, great public blessings;—if you desire to see them firmly sustained by public sentiment, and adapted to answer public expectation; nay, if you do not wish to find them *cheating* yourselves and your children into comparative ignorance, or, at least, superficiality, in Christian doctrine;—watch over the Sabbath Schools, and the Bible Classes in your respective congregations with intense interest. Carry into them, and unfold, with unremitting diligence, those views of Gospel truth which you honestly believe to be agreeable to the word of God. Add

to the Sabbath School lesson, such excellent and scriptural formularies of doctrine, as shall prepare your youthful charge to receive, not merely a meagre outline, but a strong and well delineated portrait of that blessed system of "grace and truth," which it is happy for every one to know, "from a child," as distinctly and clearly as possible. Follow the *Tract*, which, as a powerful pioneer, has gone before you, and prepared the way ;—follow it, as far as possible, with still deeper instruction in the precious general truths which it unfolds. Remember that, although the whole Christian world is in motion, the great movements of the day embrace no plan for the dissemination of sound, distinguishing doctrine. There is no Institution, no Society which has for its object that on behalf of which I plead in this discourse. It is left to be pursued by the Pastors and other Officers, and, with their aid, by all the members of our respective Churches. Thus you will guard against the evils which some have predicted, as likely to arise from union in these operations. You will contribute your share to render the Institutions of which we speak more extensively useful ; more firmly popular ; and a richer blessing to yourselves and your children. Nay, strange as it may seem to some, you will do more to harmonize and unite Christians of different denominations in every hallowed affection and enterprise, than by any other course you can possibly pursue.

9. Once more ; the great importance of diffusing sound, scriptural knowledge among the people, not only appears from the character of the day in which we live ; *but also from the character of those days which we hope and believe are approaching.*

That times of deep interest to the Church and the world are hastening on, the watchmen on the walls of Zion seem generally to agree. When we are asked, indeed, what will be the precise aspect and bearing of these coming scenes, we dare not venture to foretel in detail. But that *two features* will be very prominent and impressive, I think we may venture, without presumption, confidently to anticipate. In the *first* place, we may hope that the approaching times will be distinguished by REVIVALS OF RELIGION, more frequent, more extensive, and more glorious than we have ever been accustomed to contemplate : And, *secondly*, by A BOLDNESS AND BITTERNESS OF OPPOSITION, on the part of the enemies of the Gospel, no less marked, and beyond all former precedent. Now, unless I greatly mistake, it is of the utmost importance, as a preparation for both these events, that care be taken to spread "sound doctrine," as deeply and extensively as possible, through every portion of the community, and especially among the rising generation.

With respect to the importance of this preparation for *revivals of Religion*, of extraordinary extent and power, it is so obvious, that I need but hint at the subject. It is known, by painful experience, that powerful effusions of the Holy Spirit are often accompanied by perversions and abuses, which tend, at once, to tarnish their lustre, and to arrest their progress. False zeal, extravagance, ebullitions of animal sympathy, enthusiasm, and various kinds of disorder, have so often followed in the train of undoubted operations of the grace of God, that many have been prejudiced against revivals of religion altogether, and been ready to pronounce them all a miserable delu-

sion, and the very term, a watchword of fanaticism. Now, there is hardly any point respecting which enlightened and pious divines are more agreed, than that the irregularities and extravagancies to which I have just alluded, are most apt to occur among a people comparatively uninstructed on the subject of Religion. When such a people have so great a subject powerfully presented to them, not only in the preaching of the word, but also in the visible triumphs of its Divine energy; no wonder they are often excited in a manner, and fall into disorders, which intelligent Christians contemplate with regret. Powerful feeling, without enlightened judgment to controul it; ardent “zeal, without knowledge” to regulate it, have been, in all ages, the bane both of the purity and the order of the Church. Whereas all experience testifies, that such excesses and disorders seldom occur, and, certainly, are much less likely to occur, in Churches in which the people have been early and carefully trained in the knowledge of divine truth. Such a people will have the best defence against enthusiasm, against fanaticism, against superstition, against all the forms in which “strange fire” is apt to burst out, and work mischief in seasons of excitement.

If ministers, then, wish the people of their charge to be prepared for revivals of Religion; to profit by them most effectually; and to be carried through them in a happy manner;—if they wish revivals to come to them in their most sound and genuine character, and to leave behind them their happiest results;—if it be their desire, in short, that the fruits of these blessed “rains of righteousness” should be, not stunted, feeble, and short-lived plants, which, having “no deepness of earth,” will speedily wither away;—

but firm, lofty and thriving trees, fixed deep in the soil of Christian instruction and experience ;—let them labour without ceasing to imbue every mind within their reach, as early as possible, with sound, Bible doctrine ; with clear, discriminating, Scriptural knowledge.

Of no less importance is a deep and intimate knowledge of divine truth, as a preparation for days of *conflict with the enemies of religion*. The great adversary, knowing that “his time is short,” is stirring up, and will, probably, more and more stir up, infidels, skeptics, heretics, and, perhaps, some formalists who pass for orthodox,—to oppose the claims and the progress of vital piety ; and especially the claims and the progress of Christian effort. Effort for honouring the Holy Sabbath ; for improving, in every form, the intellectual, moral and religious state of society ; and for evangelizing the world ;—For, surely, no ultimate object short of this, can bound the ambition of Christians. Now, there seems every prospect that the opposition of which I speak will wax louder and stronger,—wielding the weapons of ridicule, calumny, cruel mockings, and every form of reviling that bigotry, prejudice, or impiety can forge ;—until it shall reach that stage of warfare, called in the Apocalypse, “the great day of the battle of God Almighty.” A “Battle” which is destined, not long hence, to divide, to convulse, and to emancipate the world.

Now, for this conflict, in all its stages, one of the most important preparations is a mature and thorough acquaintance with revealed truth. Hence the inspired Apostle, in speaking of the Christian’s contest with the powers of darkness, exhorts him to take the “Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” as

one of the most indispensable and efficient portions of his armour. Accordingly, it is observable, that our blessed Saviour, in resisting the devil, when exposed to his severest temptation in the wilderness, resorted to the Scriptures of truth as his principal weapon. To the most insidious attempts to ensnare him, his reply constantly was—"It is written"—"It is written." Before this weapon even Satan could not stand. He cowered and withdrew, abashed and defeated. And whenever a similar conflict with the powers of darkness and their emissaries, shall come upon any of "the dwellers upon earth," to "try the spirits" of men, and especially to "sift as wheat" the ranks of professors; happy will those be who shall be found enlightened and confirmed, as well as sincere and warm-hearted Christians! Happy, and only happy, in that day, will those be, who shall be found intelligently "holding fast the faithful word," and "ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear"! These are the men to triumph in perilous service, and to display the power of Christian courage and magnanimity. These, when the storm rages, will be found stable and safe as the Rock on which their feet are placed. A little band of them will do more to strike terror into the ranks of error and sin, and to "turn to flight the armies of the aliens," than thousands of your superficial professors, who have little or no "root in themselves," and who, "when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by will be offended;" and either openly turn traitors to the best of causes; or, before they are aware, be swept from their apparent standing, by the power of the foe, and fall, with their whole weight, into his unhallowed territory.

Having dwelt so long on the importance of maintaining and diffusing "sound doctrine," let us next,

II. Inquire, in what MANNER, and BY WHAT MEANS this duty ought to be fulfilled?

Into this wide field we cannot enter at large. A few brief hints can alone be offered. And,

1. We are to maintain pure evangelical truth **FIRM-
LY** and **EARNESTLY**. "Contend," says the inspired Apostle,—*"Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."* Many, indeed, entertain a prejudice against all controversy on the subject of religious doctrine, and imagine that it is never productive of any thing but evil. But this is a prejudice merely, and a prejudice as unreasonable as it is unscriptural. If the truth of God's word be really of sufficient value to be worth defending; if there be multitudes in the world who continually hate and oppose it; and if it cannot be maintained and propagated without frequently pleading in its behalf against "gainsayers;"—then controversy, even religious controversy, is sometimes unavoidable. The Prophets, the Apostles, nay Christ himself, often engaged in controversy; and have made it our duty, by precept as well as by example, whenever it is necessary, to do the same. But we need go no further than our context, for an express authority to this effect. The Apostle, in the very next verse, to enforce the duty of "holding fast the faithful word," and maintaining "sound doctrine," observes—"For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, *whose mouths must be stopped*, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. Wherefore

rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." I grant, indeed, that this duty is often a self-denying and painful one. But this is no reason why it should not be considered as sometimes incumbent upon us. It is not pleasant to be called upon to defend our property against robbers, or our lives against assassins. But as long as there are robbers and assassins in the world, we must submit to the necessity of resisting their violence. In like manner, as long as there are opposers and revilers of the truth, it will be a part of that "good fight of faith," which we are commanded to maintain, to defend it with firmness and zeal against every hostile invader.

2. While we maintain the truth *firmly* and *earnestly*, we ought, at the same time, to do it *MILDLY*, and, as far as possible, *INOFFENSIVELY*; with "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Not haughtily, or dogmatically; but in the spirit of Christian benevolence. Not harshly, or with unnecessary severity; but with paternal affection. Not after the manner of the "disputers of this world;" but, like a messenger from above, intent, not on *victory*, but on *doing good*. Not as though we had "dominion over the faith" of our hearers; but as humble helpers of their spiritual benefit. For this purpose, we ought to make constant appeals to the authority of the Master whose truth we dispense; illustrating Scripture by Scripture; and going continually to the Sacred Oracles for all our positions, and all our weapons; remembering that one, "thus saith the Lord," is worth a thousand of our own philosophical deductions, however plausible or imposing. In short, I am constrained to believe that, even in defending the most precious truth, it is

the pious *Waldenses*, in the dark ages, solemnly recorded, at different periods, that testimony to the truth and order of the Gospel, which rendered them “lights in the world” while they flourished; and have served to illuminate and encourage the steps of millions in succeeding times. And it is thus that our beloved Church, by her ecclesiastical Formularies, bears witness to the truth, amidst the multiplied corruptions in doctrine and order with which she is surrounded. She claims for these Formularies no intrinsic authority whatever. The BIBLE is her only rule of faith and practice. Her Confession of Faith and Catechisms are her public and solemn testimony, as a Church, to what she deems the doctrines of the Bible. Of course, to depart from these, is, in her opinion, to depart from the only infallible rule. So far, then, as ecclesiastical Formularies are founded on the word of God;—so long as they speak its language, and breathe its spirit;—and unless they do this, they are unworthy of being received at all;—but so long as they bear this character, it is incumbent on all the members, and especially on all the Leaders and Guides of the Church, to honour them; to hold them fast; and carefully to employ them for the great purposes which they were intended to answer; that is, for imbuing the youthful mind with the elements of evangelical truth; and for securing soundness in the faith in those who are introduced to the offices of teaching and ruling in the Church. When, therefore, these formularies are duly respected, and faithfully employed, in their appropriate character: when Ministers, Elders, and Parents, in their respective charges, are found applying them with diligence to the youth under their care: when the

Sabbath-School, the Catechetical Class, and the domestic circle, can all bear testimony to the fidelity with which they are sustained: And, finally, when ecclesiastical Judicatories, faithful to the spirit and purpose of these public Standards, close the door of admission to office in the Church, against all who are known to be unfriendly to them;—then, and then only, can they be said to act, with fidelity, in the spirit of our text.

5. Again; it is important that we maintain and propagate sound doctrine **IN ITS PROPER CONNECTION AND ORDER**. Not that it is necessary formally to exhibit to every one a complete system of divinity; or to aim at making all around us systematic divines. Still, in the world of grace, as well as of nature, one thing is connected with another. There is a real plan and order in which Gospel truths impart light, strength and glory to each other. And, accordingly, we read in Scripture of “the proportion of faith,” of “the analogy of faith,” and of “the *first principles* of the doctrine of Christ;” plainly implying, that the genuine Gospel of Christ is a connected, proportionate, consistent, orderly system; and that the relation of its parts ought by no means to be neglected, either in studying them for ourselves, or in imparting them to others. The most illiterate and youthful minds, I am persuaded, are often *profited* by an attention to this point, on the part of their teachers, even before they are capable of *perceiving the fact*, and far less of *understanding its reason*.

And here I cannot resist the conviction that a word ought to be said in favour of a method of instruction, highly prized and much practised by our Fathers, but

which *we*, their children, have suffered to fall into comparative disuse. I mean that plan of pulpit instruction commonly called *Expounding*, or *Lecturing*. The method of preaching on single, insulated texts, now almost universal, was scarcely known in the Church until about the thirteenth century. The effect of this innovation has been, to render the *Preacher* more prominent than the "*faithful Word*," which he professes to explain; and, consequently, to diminish a taste for the study of the Scriptures in their connection. What we style *Lecturing*, or expounding large passages of the sacred text, was, undoubtedly, the primitive mode of preaching; and, although certainly the most difficult of execution; yet when well conducted, by far the most profitable, both to the preacher himself, and to his hearers. It constrains the preacher to study the contents of the Bible in their instructive connection; to be familiar with every part of the Scriptures; to treat all classes of subjects; and to be in the habit of explaining the Bible by itself. And, where he expounds a *whole book* in course, he has his subject, for one part of the day at least, always before him, for weeks if not months together, so that he cannot lose a moment in searching for a text. And what is no less important, he is enabled to discuss in their turn, as they present themselves on the sacred page, the most delicate and unusual topics, either of doctrine or duty, without incurring the charge of either personality, or sinister design. Nor are the advantages less which accrue to the *hearers*, from this plan of preaching. It leads them to carry their Bibles to the house of God; to meditate much there on the faithful word; to think of it more frequently at home; to trace its connec-

tion with more interest ; and to feel, from sabbath to sabbath, as if they were listening to Jehovah himself, rather than to the humble messenger of his truth. When pulpit discourses shall become less of eloquent orations on announced subjects ; and more of simple, affectionate, and faithful expositions and applications of Scripture ; they will become, I doubt not, more effectual in convincing and converting sinners, as well as in building up believers in faith and holiness unto salvation.

6. I will only add, it is important that sound doctrine be maintained and propagated **IN A DISTINGUISHING, PRACTICAL AND POINTED MANNER** ; in a manner adapted to impress the *heart* as well as the understanding. We are not to communicate truth upon a plan calculated to promote mere frigid orthodoxy ; but upon a plan suited to address, and to win every part of man's nature ; his conscience, his will, and his affections, as well as his intellectual powers :—in short, in a manner which amounts to what the Apostle styles, “ rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving to every one, whether saint or sinner, his portion in due season.” The fact is, there is nothing to which depraved man is more prone, even after turning his attention to the subject of religion, than to rely on something formal, external and speculative, instead of the immoveable Rock which is laid *in Zion*. Self-righteousness, in a thousand shapes, is the grand delusion of our nature. And it is evident that the spirit of self-righteousness may feed upon *doctrines* as well as upon *works*. A man, as one strongly expresses it, “ may be frozen to the very seat of life, in the ice of orthodoxy.” He may have the heart of the

veriest Pharisee, while his head is stored with the soundest opinions. It is of the utmost importance, then, that "sound doctrine" be presented, not as a mere system of speculations; but as a body of vital principles; as ever pointing to experimental piety, and to holy practice, and as of no ultimate value without both. It is in this manner that the great doctrines of the Gospel are exhibited in the Holy Scriptures; and *we* shall never be so likely to exhibit them profitably, as when we adopt the same plan, and teach "as the Holy Ghost teacheth."

The foregoing discussion furnishes matter for a variety of practical inferences; to some of which allow me to request your serious attention.

1. We may learn from this subject *what ought to be the general structure and character of Gospel Sermons*. Some have supposed, and have explicitly taught, that the only legitimate object of preaching is to *convey instruction*; to *inform the understanding*. While others have gone to the opposite extreme, and have insisted that the grand object aimed at in Sermons ought to be, not to convey instruction; but to *impress the moral and active powers*; to excite, to alarm, to awaken, to warm, to impel to action. Now, I apprehend that that discourse is of very little value as a Gospel Sermon, which is formed, exclusively, upon either of these plans. The proclamation of the living Teacher is the great ordinance of God for awakening and converting the world. The children of men are asleep in sin; and, therefore, need *rousing* as well as *instruction*. On the one hand, then, that Sermon which does not "feed the people with knowledge and with understanding;" which does not distinctly

and clearly exhibit truth, Gospel truth, as the basis of all genuine feeling ; as the groundwork of all Scriptural excitement, can be but little better than empty declamation. For no excitement, no feeling, no conviction can be of any value, excepting that which is produced by the operation of truth, or, in other words, of “ sound doctrine,” on the conscience and the heart. On the other hand, that Sermon which is addressed to the intellect alone, and which, of course, is not fitted to awaken and rouse, labours under a defect quite as essential. It leaves out of view some of the most precious powers and wants of the soul. This is evident from the fact, that a man may be doctrinally enlightened in the most thorough manner, and, after all, remain a devil still. The celebrated *Ganganelli*, perhaps the brightest ornament of the Papal throne, since the rise of that enormous ecclesiastical usurpation, in one of his “ Letters,” beautifully remarks—“ If a preacher *only instruct*, he does nothing more “ than *prepare the mind*. If, on the other hand, he “ *only affect the passions*, he does but *half his work* ; “ he leaves but a slight and temporary impression. “ But if he *diffuse the light of truth*, while he scatters “ *the unction of grace*, he well fulfils his duty.” In short, the artillery of the pulpit, ought to resemble that of the skies. There ought to be *thunder* as well as *lightning*. And then may we hope that, by the divine blessing, a “ rain of righteousness” will plentifully descend.

2. We may infer from what has been said, *how infinitely important it is that Ministers carefully study and understand the truth ; that they know it deeply, accurately, and systematically !* Perhaps we may say,

that the primary and most constant employment of every faithful minister, is to present truth—evangelical truth, to the minds of men, for their sanctification. Whether he preaches, or catechises, or converses, or visits “from house to house;”—whether he opens his mouth in the public sanctuary, or the family, or the sabbath school, or the social circle, or the street, or the public conveyance, his great object is, or ought to be, to bring truth to bear on the minds of all around him, for their temporal and eternal benefit. Now, it is plain that nothing but truth can be really beneficial to men. And it is, therefore, only so far as we present genuine truth, simple, Bible truth, to those whom we approach, and present it in the spirit of its Author, that we can have any reasonable hope of doing them good. This being the case, how solemn, nay, how fearful, is the responsibility of Gospel Ministers, in reference to the doctrines which they preach! With what diligence and solicitude ought *they*, above all men, to seek to know the truth! How humbly, impartially, prayerfully, and unceasingly ought they to study it! How ought they to tremble at the thought of giving the people their own notions, instead of “the faithful word;” giving them that on which they may grow lean, and starve, nay, by which they may be fatally poisoned, instead of dispensing to them the “Bread of life!” That minister, then, I will venture to say, who is ignorant of the truth, or who has but a superficial knowledge of it; who is indifferent to the truth, or disposed to trifle or tamper with it; who is doubtful and wavering respecting the truth, or destitute of that skill which will enable him “rightly to divide it”—is not qualified to be a guide to immortal souls. Surely that man who is not “rooted and

grounded in the truth ;” who is ready to embrace, with little caution, and with less examination, every plausible error which strikes his fancy ; and who will not take the trouble diligently and laboriously to compare with the word of God, every doctrine which he dispenses, both in public and private ;—such a man gives too much evidence, that he has but little regard for the truth ; little reverence for its Author ; little sense, either of the difficulty or the importance of finding the truth ; and little enlightened concern for the souls of men. I believe it will be found, universally true, that, in proportion as Ministers possess the spirit of their Master, they will be conscientious and careful in studying the doctrines which they preach ; slow, cautious and prayerful in embracing new opinions ; and deeply solicitous that they preach “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” in all their ministrations.

3. If the foregoing principles be well founded, *then we ought to regard with the most serious apprehension any material departure from Orthodoxy, especially among the Teachers and Rulers of the Church.* If I mistake not, there are those, even among the Orthodox themselves, who estimate the mischief and danger of false doctrine as comparatively small ; and, as to the mass of society, they are ready to ridicule the idea of any serious practical evil as likely to flow from doctrinal error. These are matters, as multitudes believe, about which bigoted theologians may be expected to dispute, and to waste their time and strength ; but in which the great interests of the community at large, and even of the Church, are but little involved. There can scarcely be a greater

delusion. Not only does the Bible represent *all* departures from the faith, as evil, and, if they be *essential*, as destructive of Christian character and hope ; but all ecclesiastical history serves at once to illustrate and confirm the melancholy representation. When the leaders of the Church, in the second and third centuries, began to swerve from the simple and genuine doctrines of the Gospel, vital piety, and holy living began to decline in the same proportion. In the fifth century, when, by means of the labours of *Augustine*, and his faithful coadjutors, the eyes of thousands were opened to see the error of Pelagian and Semi-pelagian opinions, and Orthodoxy sensibly revived, there was an immediate revival of vital piety, the effects of which were precious and lasting. In several subsequent periods ; in the days of *Godeschalcus* ; of *Claudius* of *Turin* ; of the *Waldenses* ; of *Wickliffe* ; and of *Huss* and *Jerome*, it was evident that practical godliness revived or declined, just as sound or erroneous doctrines bore sway. When Gospel truth was brought forth, in its genuine lustre, by the Reformers, pure and undefiled religion sprung forth, as it were by enchantment, in the same proportion. And, on the contrary, when, toward the close of the sixteenth century, and during the seventeenth, orthodoxy declined in all the Protestant churches, and in some of them to a deplorable degree ; there was a corresponding depression, in every one of them, of zeal, and of all the great interests of practical religion. Of these churches, the history of few is more melancholy than those of *France*. For more than three quarters of a century after their first organization, they were among the most pure and flourishing in Reformed Christendom. And as long

as their pious Pastors continued to be sound in doctrine, faithful in adhering to their excellent Confession of Faith, indefatigable in catechising their children and youth, and in the private as well as the public instruction of all classes of their people ;—notwithstanding all the rigours and frowns of a hostile government, they prospered, multiplied, and were comparatively happy. But no sooner did orthodoxy decline in those churches ; no sooner did *Cameron*, *Amyraut*, and other divines of distinction and influence, begin to verge towards Semi-pelagian opinions, than an immediate and sensible decay ensued in piety, in zeal, and in pure morals. Indeed it seemed as if, from the time that the infection of these errors became in any considerable degree extended, their peace was interrupted ; their unity broken ; their standing with the government, in the righteous judgment of God, less comfortable ; until, on their whole state was written—“Ichabod, the glory is departed !” And, to this day, their glory has never been restored. As they went on to sink lower and lower in error, they became also more and more depressed in every thing that constitutes the true excellence and happiness of a church. No less instructive, as to this point, is the history of the established Church of *England*. The decline and the revival of pure, evangelical doctrine, in that Church, have invariably marked a corresponding decline and revival of true, practical religion. Nor can it be doubted that, in all cases whatsoever, the effect of error must be injurious, and the influence of truth healthful and happy, just so far as they respectively prevail. The innocence of error,—nay the *entire* innocence of *any* error,—is one of the dreams of infidelity. Little does the ingenious and

self-confident advocate of false doctrine think of the mischief he is doing. He may be greatly elated with his philosophical refinements, and plausible novelties. But so far as his speculations affect or approach the fundamental principles of the Gospel, and gain prevalence among the people, "they will eat as doth a canker;" they will eat out piety, peace, brotherly love, revivals of religion, holy living, social order and happiness, and every thing which ought to be dear to the friend either of God or man. The Lord preserve his Church from such miserable speculations, under the name of improvements in theology !

4. From what has been said, we may see, that all private members of the Church, as well as her ministers, *ought to consider themselves as having a share, and a very important share, in the duty of holding fast the "faithful word."* It is observable that on all classes of persons connected with the Church of Crete, where *Titus*, the person addressed, now was ;—on the old, and the young ; on both sexes ; and on persons in office and out of it, the Apostle enjoins the duty more particularly inculcated in our text upon Ministers. Read the whole Epistle, and especially the chapters immediately containing, and immediately following our text ; and you will perceive that the inspired writer exempts none from the solemn charge. He exhorts aged men, and aged women likewise ; young men, and young women, and even servants—in various forms of expression, indeed, but in the same spirit—to see not only that they were themselves "sound in the faith;" but also that they all watched over one another ; that each and every one might be "in doctrine uncorrupt," and "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things."

Do you ask, my friends, in what manner *you*, who are not ministers of the Gospel, can promote the prevalence of Gospel truth? I answer, in the first place,—Never oppose it. Never give countenance, directly or indirectly, to the advocates or the acts of error. Never account your Minister “your enemy, because he tells you the truth.” On the contrary, encourage and support him in all his scriptural fidelity; and never ask him to prophesy “smoother things” than the Bible prophesies. But, more than this; take care to store your own minds with sound, discriminating, digested, religious knowledge. “Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding.” Store the minds of your children, also, your servants, and all committed to your care, with the same heavenly treasure. Teach them, as early as possible, to commit to memory portions of the Holy Scriptures, and the excellent Catechisms of our Church. Talk to them of the doctrines as well as the duties of Religion, “when you sit in your houses, and when you walk by the way; when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Put them on their guard continually against the insinuations of error, as well as against the pollutions of practical wickedness. In a word, endeavour, from the earliest dawn of reason, until they cease to be under your care, to lodge in their minds as large an amount of rich, assorted Gospel truth, as you can induce them to receive. And, finally, make the same efforts, as you may have opportunity, among your neighbours, young and old. Thus may every private christian, every day and hour that he lives, if he have himself sufficient religious knowledge, and, above all, if he have a *heart* for the purpose, scatter blessings

around him ; blessings to his family ; to the Church of God ; to the whole community :—blessings which will not “perish in the using,” but transmit their hallowed influence far and wide ; benefit, it may be, thousands of precious immortals ; and stretch into a boundless eternity.

5. This subject suggests many considerations *worthy of being deeply pondered by Him who is about to be constituted the Pastor of this Church.* Beloved, and highly respected Brother in Christ, this is a solemn day for you ! You have consented to come hither, to stand as a Watchman on this part of the “wall of Zion ;” to guard your Master’s honour ; to contend for his truth ; to plead his cause against “gainsayers ;” to take your station in the “front of the battle ;” to wield the “sword of the Spirit” daily and hourly ; and to cheer and help on, in all its departments and interests, that **GREAT CAUSE** for which the Saviour laid down his life ; which the world is every where opposing ; and which can be carried on only by fighting for every inch of ground. To aid in bearing forward this cause, in this part of the Church, you stand here to pledge yourself to-day. Solemn pledge ! Momentous enterprise ! You are not so inexperienced in this warfare, as to dream of victory without hard fighting. The servant is not greater than his Master, nor the disciple above his Lord. The best wish I can form for you, then, my Friend, my Brother, at this interesting moment, is, that you may come girded with the genuine spirit of a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.” And what is the spirit of a soldier ? In this, as in every other warfare, it is a spirit of undaunted courage ; of boundless confidence in your

Leader ; of implicit obedience to his orders ; of prudence, foresight, perseverance, and a readiness to lay down even your life in his service. Cherish this spirit, and act upon it, and all will be well. The result will be blessed to yourself, blessed to this Congregation, and blessed to the Redeemer's kingdom in our land. We cordially welcome your entrance into our Body ; and while we offer you our fraternal salutations, our hopes and our prayers ascend, that the solemn transaction of this hour, may long be matter of joy, not only to yourself, but to all of us who stand here before the Lord !

6. Finally ; the subject on which we have been meditating, involves many considerations, *which deserve to be well weighed by the members of this Church and Society, on the present occasion.* It teaches us, that "sound doctrine" is in order to godliness ; that cold, heartless orthodoxy alone, can avail us nothing, but to aggravate our condemnation ; and, of course, that it becomes every gospel hearer to look well to the manner in which he receives the precious truth of God. My respected and beloved Friends of this Congregation, you have long enjoyed the privilege of sound instruction in divine things. For the labours of that able, faithful, and beloved Man, who was instrumental in forming this Church, and who so long ministered to you in holy things,* you have a solemn

* It may not be improper to mention, for the sake of readers beyond the bounds of the Presbyterian Church, if the eye of any such should light on this page—that the beloved and lamented Man here alluded to is the late Reverend JOHN CHESTER, D. D. who was for many years the Pastor of the Congregation here addressed ; and the praise of whose talents, piety, pastoral fidelity, public spirit, and peculiarly polished, pleasant and attractive manners, is in all the Churches.

account to give. We are all witnesses with what force, and tenderness, and fidelity he instructed, and warned you, from the Pulpit, and by Letter, as well as from house to house. And now, before your account with Him is finally closed at the bar of God, where you have yet to meet him, You are about to receive another Pastor. We congratulate you on your choice and prospects. But while you rejoice in them, "rejoice with trembling." Tremble, lest some of you be found to be "hearers of the word only, and not doers, deceiving your own souls." Truly, my Friends, it is a solemn thing for a people to have Teacher after Teacher, and warning after warning, in sacred things. If they profit not in a saving manner by them, they are only preparing for a more aggravated condemnation. You may love your Minister; you may admire his preaching; you may hang upon his lips with delight, from sabbath to sabbath; you may become Biblical critics, and even sticklers for Orthodoxy, under his ministrations; and yet, after all, may "know nothing," on the subject of religion, "as you ought to know." After all, you may have none of that spiritual knowledge of God, of yourselves, and of the Saviour, which is "life eternal." While, therefore, I exhort you, my dear hearers, to seek sound doctrinal knowledge, with unceasing diligence, I charge you, in the name of Him, whose I am, and whom I serve, not to rest satisfied with mere speculation. You must "know the truth" in the love and power of it, or "it had been better for you that you had never been born." If you have never yet bowed, then, to the power of the Gospel, as a practical system, bow to it now. *Not to-morrow, for*

you know not that to-morrow will ever be yours. Now repent and believe the Gospel. Now "yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead." "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." "To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts." GRACE BE WITH YOU ALL! Amen!————



